

Indigenous letters in colonial Brazil: a Tupi-correspondence during the Dutch Wars in 1645/1646¹

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There are currently only very few special studies about indigenous documents in colonial Brazil. This article is supposed to constitute a preliminary contribution to the question whether genuine indigenous documents existed in colonial Brazil. First we will determine which part of the indigenous population was able to produce these documents supposing an elevated degree of European induced literacy. In the second part we will study in depth the most important corpus of documents issued by Indians in Brazil, letters written during the Dutch wars in the 17th century and a related text.

The authors

As the Brazilian Indians had no tradition of written documents in their civilizations (even considering that stone engravings were regarded by various tribes as elements of cultural memory recording a visit by a mythical hero and excluding quipos perhaps spread in the Amazonian region), the use of written documents begins in the colonial era and is clearly limited to the parts of the population in continuous contact with European settlers. The indigenous authors were go-betweens between European cultures (mainly Portuguese but also French or other nations) and their native tribal civilization. Therefore we first have to look closely at the go-betweens and their role in colonial society.

In the early years after its probably accidental discovery in 1500 Brazil was considered as a part of minor importance among the Portuguese colonies compared to the richness of India and served mainly as a provision stop on voyages to the east. Apart from the Brazilwood trade the land had no economic importance. The Portuguese Crown decreed a royal monopoly for this commerce and granted it in contracts to merchants. These Portuguese merchants established “feitorias”, fortified trading posts facing French invaders interested in this highly profitable trade. A resident representative called “factor” supervised the trade. These factors were permitted to play the role of transactional go-betweens.

¹ This article was written as contribution to the Bielefeld conference “Colonialism and the Culture of Writing - Language and Cultural Contact in Colonial Discourse Traditions”, ZiF Bielefeld, 20-22 June 2007. As the proceedings have not been published, I decided to make the study available on the Internet 2016.

In 1530 Martim Afonso de Sousa founded São Vicente as colony. Later on in 1534 the country was divided into hereditary grants (capitanias commanded by donatários). Only few outposts along the coast were founded, lines drawn parallel to the equator bisected the coast at 50-league intervals extended to the line of demarcation with Spain (as agreed in the Treaty of Tordesillas 1493). Only São Vicente and Pernambuco were economically successful with a new economic focus on sugar. Cultivation rested on the backs of slaves. Successful trading posts emerged where alliances had been struck between European adventurers and native headmen, cemented by marriage strategies, as headmen adopted outsiders as sons-in-law (see in the La Plata region the “tovaja”, sons-in-law).

Go-betweens are mentioned in all kinds of documents from the early colonial times on and their role in maintaining the contact between Europeans and Indians is known for its deep impact on the formation of colonial society. However the European-born go-betweens have been studied more than the indigenous ones, because sources are dealing more frequently with them. Metcalf 2005 tries to give a typology of go-betweens. She differentiates between “physical”, “transactional” and “representational” ones. The first group would be virtually everyone crossing the Atlantic (banished criminals, European sailors). Transactional go-betweens are to be seen in merchants’ agents and Europeans who «went native» leaving thus their native culture for a temporary or permanent stay among the Indians. Representational go-betweens were cartographers and European writers about the country publishing their maps or books back in Europe (a printing press didn’t exist in Brazil until the arrival of the Portuguese court at the beginning of the 19th century). Even if this typology gives no special place to natives it illustrates the different degrees of knowledge and insight European travellers could have had into the country in the 16th century.

Hans Staden, author of the best known document about early Brazil, the *Warhaftige Historia* published in Marburg 1557 mentions a French interpreter named Karuattuware, who refused to redeem him from his prison amongst the Indians on the Brazilian coast between Rio de Janeiro and São Vicente.² We don’t know his real name but the interpretation of his Tupi name seems to express his key role between the groups involved in colonial trade.³ Karwattuware

² See Hans Staden: *Warhaftige Historia. Zwei Reisen nach Brasilien, (1548-1555) / Historia de duas viagens ao Brasil*, kritische Ausgabe / edição crítica: Franz Obermeier, (Fontes Americanae, 1), Kiel: Westensee-Verlag 2007: 68 of the original 1557 text and the commentary 191.

³ Until now his name was interpreted as derived from the Brazilian “caraguatá”, a plant he was supposed to eat. As this plant is not edible, the interpretation proposed in my critical edition as “Karuguatavare”, „the one eating

could not oppose the wishes of his Indian allies by saving Staden, nor was it in his interest to do so. Staden himself was only able to survive by adapting the role of an indigenous shaman, thus becoming as Metcalf puts it with regard to his later *Historia* about the Tupi the “consummate go-between”: physical-transactional and representational (Metcalf 2008).⁴ Metcalf’s typology is useful and should be applied to the various documents the go-betweens left. As she points out: “Virtually all the transactional go-betweens of the first generation are silent to us, for most were at best semiliterate...By midcentury, one group of transactional go-betweens appears frequently in the writings of several Europeans who visited Brazil. These go-betweens were the Norman interpreters, or truchements”, (Metcalf 2005: 63/64). Indirectly some interpreters and truchements left us their information. The increased ethnological information in Thevet’s later works *Cosmographie universelle* 1575, *Manuscrit de deux voyages*, circa 1585, one version ed. by Jean-Claude Laborie / Frank Lestringant 2006) compared with his *Singularitez* from 1557/58 is certainly due to contact with Portuguese sailors possibly in French harbours.⁵

We know a lot about the French interpreters from Normandy. Norman interpreters are frequently mentioned as source for ethnological information. Interpreters’ sexual intercourse with Indian women and their deep understanding of indigenous thought led them to be seen as potentially suspicious to some Europeans. Jean de Léry, known for his rather sympathetic view on the Tupinamba civilization and their moral values he appreciated during his stay in the French colony in Rio de Janeiro in the 1550th, is severe about interpreters’ behaviour. He even approves the death penalty imposed to one of them by Villegagnon for his intercourse with Indian women (Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage*, first edition [Geneva] 1578, here: ed. 1580: 72). Despite this, Léry includes a colloquial dictionary written by an unknown French interpreter in his *Histoire* in 1578 as a separate chapter (XX) without giving the author’s name but referring to his help. In fact he only added a few parts in form of a list of villages at the end. Most of his works’ ethnological parts and its chapters on natural history are certainly also relying on interpreters’ information.

while he is wandering“, Staden, critical edition 2007, text 68, commentary 191 seems to be more pertinent as allusion to his frequent travels between French and Indians assuring the trade contacts.

⁴ See the title of her contribution to the Staden congress in Wolfhagen 2007 published as *Die Warhaftige Historia von 1557-das erste Brasilienbuch*, ed. by Franz Obermeier und Wolfgang Schiffner, Kiel: Westensee-Verlag 2008: 71-86.

⁵ See my comparison about the descriptions of cannibalism between German, French and Portuguese: Obermeier 2001.

Even in Portuguese dominated Brazil the colonists' situation was just as heavily dependent on the cooperation with go-betweens. These are mentioned in the South Brazil harbour of Cananéia as early as 1527. There lived a "bachiller", an educated or well-spoken man, mentioned by Pero Lopes de Sousa in his *Diario da navegação*, 1527. For the São Paulo region the crucial role of João Ramalho for assuring Portuguese domination of the hinterland of São Vicente as well as his helping to found São Paulo as Piratininga in 1554 is known. We have an early German description of Ramalho's home by the German soldier Ulrich Schmidel (Ulrico Schmidl) on his way back to Europe from Asunción in Paraguay to São Vicente, crossing the Tupi land and Ramalho's zone of influence. He describes his house in his travel narrative about his stay as part of Mendoza's expedition in the La Plata region in 1534-1554, written in 1553 and published for the first time as *Warhaftige Beschreibung* in 1567, as part of Sebastian Franck's *Weltbuch* by the Frankfurt based editor Sigismund Feyerabend (in the autograph Stuttgart manuscript, 102v-103v., see my critical edition 2008: 143).

Lots of go-betweens were "mamelucos" (children of mixed race, descendants from Indian mother and Portuguese fathers) helping the colonists (as the Braga Brothers mentioned frequently by Hans Staden in his *Warhaftige Historia* 1557: 47,104,105,109). The Braga protected the passage between the Island of Santo Amaro and the mainland and built a fort near Bertioga where Staden found work as a gunner and where he was kidnapped by Indians in 1554.

Another famous go-between was Diogo Alvares, known as Caramuru, living near the Bay of All Saints. Ally of Francisco Pereira Coutinho, he arrived in 1536, and later became the hero of the literary epos *Caramuru* by Santa Rita Durão, published at Lisbon 1781. Last but not least we have to mention the Jesuits' missionary work in Brazil which drove them to work as go-betweens themselves. After having to rely in the beginning on interpreters such as Caramuru and even using them during confession, they learned the Indian languages soon. For their main aims like teaching, translating, praying and absolving, they needed extensive language skills. Their most important representatives in the 16th century, José de Anchieta and Manuel de Nóbrega, served as hostages in a peace deal with the coastal Tupinamba. They left Bertioga in São Vicente in April 1563 and headed north, anchored off Iperoig. We have the personal account of Anchieta about this stay in his Letter to Diego Lainez, São Vicente. 01/08/1556, published in the *Monumenta Brasiliae*, 4 (1960): 120-181. In September 1563

Cunhambebe brought Anchieta back to Bertioga, Nóbrega had returned earlier. This time allowed them a deep linguistic contact with native Tupi.

Jesuit correspondence with the General in Rome and their brothers in Portugal gives us an important insight into their methods of language learning⁶, leading to Anchieta's Grammar *Arte de gramática da língua mais usada na costa do Brasil*, Coimbra 1595. Later they became the most powerful self-conscious representational go-betweens, using their correspondence with Europe to influence European perceptions of Brazil and produce ethnological works (Fernão Cardim, *Tratados* written after 1583)

Interpreters in French colonies

Which role did the Indians hold as interpreters? Taking for example evidence from the short-lived but well-documented French colony in North Brazilian São Luis (1612-1615)⁷ we are able to focus on their overwhelming importance for colonialization.

In São Luis we find three main types of interpreters and we are able to show their origin and socioeconomic background due to the detailed sources. One of them, Charles de Vaux, was a French nobleman living in Maranhão for some years with the Indians. He promoted the French colony on his return to France. He later died in a Portuguese prison.

David Migan (the Indian name he used was similar: Migão, a kind of porridge) was a Norman sailor reputed to be the best interpreter. He is mentioned frequently by Claude d'Abbeville (*Histoire de la mission*, Paris 1614: 332 r., on 153 v. alluding to his stay from his early childhood on) and was always called to appease the Indians in difficult situations. He died in the fights against the Portuguese in 1614.

And most interesting for us: we know about two Indian interpreters called by their French Christian names Sebastien and Gregoire. These two Indians had been catechized by the Brazilian Jesuits in the Portuguese dominated region of Pernambuco. Later they came to Maranhão, allied with the French, married and explained the Christian prayers learned during

⁶ Cf. Obermeier 2004.

⁷ For the French colony in São Luis see Obermeier 1995. For the interpreters also Obermeier 1998. New edition of Yves d'Évreux' *Voyage au nord du Brésil*, 1615, Kiel 2012, ed. by F. Obermeier, digital version 2014.

their time with the Jesuits to Yves d'Évreux who transcribes them in his *Suite de l'histoire* (printed in 1615, not circulating for political reasons, first new edition under the title *Voyage dans le nord du Brésil* by Ferdinand Denis, Paris 1864, new edition by Obermeier 2012, digital version 2014).

In this rare case we are able to reconstruct the motivation of Indians for becoming interpreters. The Potiguara-Indians tried to ally with the French in order to avoid Portuguese repression in Pernambuco (the expedition of Pedro Coelho, a Portuguese capitão mor in 1603, was illegally enslaving Indians and caused great upset in the region, even legal intervention by the Portuguese court). Failed Portuguese attempts to colonize Ceará (by Jesuit father Francisco Pinto, appr. 1552-1608, another go-between behaving like an indigenous shaman (see Pompa 2003), but murdered there, and his companion Luis Figueira, later on a renowned linguist of Tupi who could escape) caused further pressure on the Indian territory. So the contact and alliance with the French allowed the Indians to survive and to maintain most of their social tribal structure.

Based on Metcalf's typology (2005) I would like to propose an attribution of certain types of documents and behaviours to the various types of go-betweens she located in colonial Brazil.

Go-betweenes and the documents they left

Physical	transactional	representational
Objects in European curiosity collections	word lists: Pigafetta Merchant's manuscripts: word lists ⁸ word lists in travel books: Yves d'Évreux, <i>Suite</i> 1615 Colloque (Léry, <i>Histoire</i> 1578) additions by Léry (word lists) Confessional word lists ⁹ Translation of prayers Dictionaries (Piratininga 1621 ¹⁰) Grammars (Anchieta, <i>Arte</i> 1594)	Travel books Tratados Jesuit letters

Early indigenous documents are only indirectly conserved by Europeans as Montaigne's transcription of Tupi songs in French (in his *Essai Des cannibales*) which he heard from his servant, a former interpreter having stayed in Brazil.¹¹ Most of the early documents have been transmitted by European interpreters, only later the Indians learned to use European techniques such as writing in certain situations. The main part of early European documents conserved up to now are administrative. Documents written by transactional go-betweenes are often fragmentary and anonymous or part of other works mainly by travel authors. Their word lists were frequently used for learning the language and conserved by authors such as Yves d'Évreux trying to help new settlers to cope with the difficulties they had to face on their arrival in the French colony.

Certainly representational European go-betweenes tried to give a complete picture for the European public, influenced by a European Christian vision in observing and writing but not

⁸ A vocabulary from the 1540th was published by Dalby and Hair 1966. Cf. for this text Christian Schmitt 2005.

⁹ We have one word list by Pero de Castilho, a Jesuit (born 1572- he died after 1631), edited by Plinio Ayrosa in 1937. The sexual vocabulary dominating this list clearly shows its use for confessional purposes.

¹⁰ *Vocabulario na lingua brasilica*. Ed. by Plinio Ayrosa in 1938, new edition by Carlos Drummond, 2 vols. 1952/1953.

¹¹ For the songs and other music transcriptions, the first we have from indigenous Brazilian music at all in Léry's *Histoire* see F. Obermeier, *Montaigne, die Wilden und das Grotteske*, 2015, available on <http://macau.uni-kiel.de/>.

lacking detailed first hand information either observed by the writers or deeply relying on transactional go-betweens and their orally transmitted information. The Indian voice is not absent but rare and representational go-betweens tend to express their own ideas through the Indian interlocutor. But the authenticity of certain conversations and inserted documents should not be peremptorily denied. As most striking example I would like to mention the Tupi mythology transcribed by Thevet in his *Cosmography* 1575, probably based on oral relations by Portuguese seamen.

Indians in Dutch Brazil

History of the Potiguara Indians in Northern Brazil

The Potiguara tribe is a well-known and often-mentioned Tupi tribe. In the early colonial time their settlements were mainly centered in the coastal region from Paraíba to Ceará, later on, due to their alliance with the French, a group was brought to the French colony in Maranhão, as we know from contemporary capuchin sources about this French colony.¹² In French documents they are denominated „Cannibaliens“, Staden calls them „Buttigariis“ in his *Historia*.¹³

The North Brazilian Potiguara were treated badly by the Portuguese after the defeat of the French in Northern Brazil (loss of Maranhão in 1615). When they attempted to ally themselves with the Dutch in Paraíba, they were abandoned by the Dutch and most of them killed in a massacre in the *Baia da Traição* (“treason bay”) in 1625. The Dutch invasion led ultimately to a political separation between the tribe members or clans, one part allied with the Dutch, another part with the Portuguese. This division is reflected by the correspondence between Indians from opposite parts of the tribe.

The documents were first published by Pedro Souto Maior in Portuguese translation in *Fastos pernambucanos*.¹⁴ The original Tupi-version of the letters has not been published, however there has been put online recently a digital version of the original manuscript material.¹⁵ They are mainly from October 1645, a few not dated but written in the same context. They are

¹² Claude d’Abbeville, *Histoire de la mission*, Paris 1614, Yves d’Évreux, *Suite de l’Histoire*, Paris 1615.

¹³ Staden, 1557 mentions them on his map on page 16 and on the page 26, 27, also on the illustration 27.

¹⁴ In: *Revista do Instituto histórico e geográfico brasileiro*, Tomo LXXV, 1912, Parte I, Rio de Janeiro 1913: 259-504, Letters and comentary: 403-414. For small extracts (based on this edition) see the bibliography. For practical reasons we give the pagination of this edition in our Portuguese extracts.

¹⁵ See the bibliography.

written by Diogo Pinheiro Camarão and Antônio Filipe Camarão to Poti, Antônio Paraupaba (other Dutch allies are mentioned such as Etagué, Barteazar (Balthazar) Araberana, Gaspar Cararu, Pedro Valadina and Yedaia in the fourth letter). One answer by Poti (10/31/1645) is conserved in Dutch translation, just as a propaganda manifesto (1645-1646 Brieven en Papieren Vol. 62, document Nr. 58 in the originals, written “aan de indianen in dienst van de Nederlanders”), instigating these Indians to leave their allies, dated March 28th 1646 also conserved only in Dutch translation. It is to stress that the fact why we only have the translation of Poti’s letter may be seen as due to two reasons: the originals were sent to the destination and no copy was conserved. It is impossible to say if the translation was the model for the extant Guarani-version or made afterwards by the Dutch from a lost or sent original to know what the Indians were writing in their letters. There is an additional letter by Antonio Camarão from August 12th 1646 at the end of the documents in the Hague Archive.

The originals are in the Archive of the West Indian Company in the Nationaal Archief van Den Haag (1645-1646 „Brieven en Papieren“), a joined Dutch translation is by Johannes Edward, a Dutch pastor in Recife, who conserved them and sent them to the WIC (his accompanying letter is to be found in Souto Maior, *Fastos* 1913: 402). Although there is no linguistically relevant analysis up to now (Sampaio 1906 only focuses on two letters), the historical background has been studied thoroughly by a Dutch historian (Hulsman 2006), the Dutch-Indian alliances in general by Meuwese (2011). We have given a brief exemplary analysis of the material (Cerno/Obermeier 2013). First a close look at what we know about the authors.

Antônio Felipe Camarão was the most important indigenous military leader fighting against the Dutch in Northern Brazil. He was born in Rio Grande do Norte or in Pernambuco in a Potiguara tribe as Poti or Potiguaçu. Educated by the Jesuits, he was baptized in 1612 and received his Christian name. He offered to fight at the side of Matias de Albuquerque. As reward for his military achievements he received the Habit of Christ and was knighted by the Portuguese king as Dom Felipe and received the title of Governador e Capitão-Mor dos índios do litoral brasileiro. He died in 1648. Antônio Filipe Camarão became a national Brazilian hero of the liberation from the Dutch.

Diogo Pinheiro Camarão [Diogo da Costa] was a parent, probably a nephew to Antônio Felipe Camarão, and also a military leader (*sargento-mor*), he signed some of the letters to Poti. Probably he was also a brother or a parent to Poti (*Terceira carta*: 405). After Felipe's death he became *capitão-mor comandante do terço dos índios*. He served the Portuguese in the two battles of Guararapes and other combats. He also took part in reconquering Recife. The governor Brito Freire ordered him to settle with his troops in a village in Serinhaem to fight against fugitive slaves. He died in 1677. A son became a military captain.¹⁶

Poti was born in Acejutibiró (in the *Baia da Traição* where the Portuguese perpetrated the aforementioned massacre on the Potiguara in 1625). He could escape the slaughter. Poti had been to the Netherlands with Antônio Paraupaba. Back in Brazil he fought for the Dutch and was caught in the second battle of Guararapes in 1649. During his imprisonment he suffered bad treatment from the Portuguese. Paraupaba mentions his torture and his death in the *Forte do Cabo de Santo Agostinho* in his second *Remonstrantie* from 1656 with dramatic details.

Paraupaba was also a Potiguara Indian, originated from the Brazilian Nordeste. In 1625 Antônio Paraupaba travelled from Brazil to the Netherlands with his father Gaspar Paraupaba and the Potiguara Poti. They were instructed on behalf of the West-Indian Company (WIC). They seemed to have returned to Brazil in 1631 where they acted as interpreters. They were needed because the Dutch intended to reconquer Paraíba and other territories adjacent to Pernambuco.

Paraupaba travelled a second time to the Netherlands in 1644 with a Brazilian delegation accompanying Johann Maurits van Nassau-Siegen when he resigned as leader of the Dutch colony in Northern Brazil. The Indians obtained their liberation by the Company's leaders as free subjects to the Dutch Republic, even if it was difficult to impose this in Brazil, where most of the settlers needed Indian labour and weren't willing to pay the due reward for their services. In 1644 he was back in Recife and presented the privileges conceded. Brazilian Indians were allowed to work as *vereadores* [Portuguese term for a post in municipal administration] in Portuguese municipalities. Paraupaba was named *Capitão* and *Regedor* in Rio Grande in June 1645. He asked again for the promised abolition of Indian slavery. Hostilities with the Tapuia broke out in 1645. Paraupaba fought against the Portuguese. The Dutch and their allies suffered defeat in Guararapes (1649), Poti was captured and later

¹⁶ Pereira da Costa 1882.

executed. Paraupaba retired with his nation to the Serra de Ibiapaba (between Maranhão and Ceará), an isolated region, and went to the Netherlands for a third time, writing his first requerimento in August 1654 (the original is lost). He called his text a Remonstrantie (from the French “remonstrance”: cf. the Spanish “requerimiento”). The Indian Paraupaba used a personal secretary and signed the manuscript version with his name (Hulsman 2006: 40). A Portuguese translation of this text is to be found in Hulsman 2006: 50-64, it was written in The Hague 04/06/1656. Paraupaba died there in 1656 shortly afterwards. Paraupaba was considered an allied military leader and was paid by the WIC equal to a Dutch officer. His widow obtained subsidies by the WIC.

His *Remonstranties* were printed as *Twee Verscheyden remonstrantien ofte vertogen ... door Anthonio Paräupába*, s’Gravenhage: Hendricus Hondius 1657. The title page is given in Hulsman, 2006: 50, a Portuguese translation of this copy in Hulsman, 2006: 51-64.

Paraupaba asked for Dutch military presence and support in Brazil, his text can be considered as a diplomatic document for European leaders equal to speeches of Indians before the French King asking for a French-Indian alliance in Maranhão in 1614, described by Claude d’Abbeville (*Histoire de la mission*, Paris 1614: 341r-342r).

The exchanged letters in Brazil

We have 7 letters of October 1645, 6 of them trying to persuade the Potiguara allied with the Dutch to desert the Dutch and fight for the Portuguese (the Portuguese version in: *Fastos*: 403-414). One additional letter is the answer from Poti refusing the offer.

Parts of the Potiguara Indians were allied with the Portuguese, their leader was the father of Dom Antônio Felipe Camarão. An exchange of letters was necessary because of the different camps’ places. Dom Antônio Felipe Camarão and Diogo Pinheiro Camarão asked Poti and other Indians in various letters to change his side and to desert. Another letter is addressed directly to Antônio Paraupaba with the same content. We have the answer of Poti dated 10/31/1645 refusing the treason.

Antônio Felipe Camarão not only wrote to the military leaders Poti and Paraupaba, but also wrote a propaganda Manifesto (03/28/1646) circulating between the Potiguara in the Dutch camps exhorting them to desert (Portuguese translation in: *Fastos*: 411-414).

A few citations show that the argumentation is developed and supposes an extensive use of writing in this social group:

Felipe Camarão writes to Poti: Fico muito admirado por vos ver afastado de nós. Não sois nosso proximo parente? Por que estais encholerizado contra nós? (10/22/1645: 403). Philippe's second letter mentions that Poti ordered the messenger bearing the letter to be executed (404). The third letter is written some days earlier as Philippe's first missive, dated 10/17/1645. It is from Diogo da Costa (Diogo Pinheiro Camarão). A little detail shows us that the different emplacement of the camps explains this parallel correspondence. In the Fourth Letter from 10/27/1645 Diogo Pinheiro mentions that Felipe is on the other side of a river ("não sómente vos envoi minha palavra, mas a que me enviou o grande capitão dom Ant^o P. Camarão do outro lado do rio", 405). The argumentation is the same. As parents they shouldn't fight each other but Poti should change his side. The fifth letter is by Camarão (written 19th of August without giving the year, i.e. 1645). Same allusion to the Portuguese strength and Dutch weakness as in other letters: "Na vêdes que duas vezes essa gente malvada [i.e. the Dutch] se apresentou em campo e duas vezes foi derrotada e posto em fuga" (406). The sixth letter is to Antonio Parauba from the 4th october [1645] signed Capitão Camarão. A parallel letter exchange was mentioned to Poti in Camarão's letter (First letter: 404) and shows that individual influence was exerted on various leaders. Poti's letter (10/31/1645), conserved in Dutch translation, gives a well-considered answer and shows his ponderation:

Estou bem aqui e nada me falta; vivemos mais livremente do que qualquer de vós, que vos mantendes sob uma nação [the Portuguese] que nunca tractou de outra cousa sinão de nos escravizar (407) [...] Os ultrajes que nos têm feito [the Portuguese] mais do que aos negros e a carneficina dos da nossa raça, executada por elles na bahia da Traição ainda estão bem frescos na nossa memoria. (408).

He mentions his daily religious practice and the absence of "idolatria" in the protestant religion. Poti alludes to his stay in the Netherlands and sees in this country's richness a visible refutation of Camarão's ideas that the Dutch were too weak to keep their colony permanently. He urges Camarão on his part to change his side. He says that he wants to receive no more letters. The manuscript *Manifesto* circulating between the Indians allied to the Dutch, shows

us a detailed argumentation and implies that at least a few Indians were able to read the document or a somewhat simplified version in translation to the others. We don't have the original version, only the translation in Dutch. It seemed to have been given to the Dutch by loyal Indians, maybe Poti himself. Camarão is also using ruses, saying that he knows from hearsay that the Dutch had the intention to abandon their colony to the Portuguese King, as they didn't feel able to keep their territory (412). He uses similar arguments drawing on the personal experience of his recipients:

Não acrediteis nesses herejes e vinde a tempo para vos salvar recebendo cada um o passaporte que lhe daremos; si não o fizerdes ficareis abandonados e não vos concederemos quartel, nem perdão, mas vos destruiremos como inimigos.

Fugi dos herejes e vinde tractar da vossa salvação. Com pudestes contar com os Hollandezes, depois delles procederem tão mal com os da vossa nação no Maranhão, pois tendolhes feito bellas promessas, justamente como agora, os enganaram e abandonaram, quando os Portuguezes retomaram o paiz? (412, the document is signed by Camarão, 03/28/1646).

It should be stressed that this passage mentions written passports to the possible defectors, another proof for a regular use of writing between the Indians in these camps.

Unfortunately there has been no further research after Sampaio (1906) about the Tupi versions and the reliability of the Dutch or the Portuguese text. The Dutch originals are difficult to read and the Tupi version was only recently put on the web and seems still unknown to scholars outside the research area. The original Tupi text should be published soon and anew be thoroughly examined linguistically. As the only remaining indigenous documents from colonial Brazil known until today to be written by Indians they are important to trace linguistic developments in the indigenous languages in colonial Brazil. A close examination should demonstrate if there is some European influence in the texts, as presumably in the argumentation structure or some references to the Bible. It is evident in the Manifesto. However, these letters were not the only documents written by Indians in the colonial times. There are few chances that new documents appear, as the *Resgate project* filming the documents about Brazil in the Portuguese and other archives, did a lot to rescue the sources about colonial Brazil in the last years. There may be some unknown documents in local archives corresponding to the cabildo documents in Spanish America. We have evidence that other Indian writings lost nowadays did exist. Padre António Vieira, the great Jesuit preacher and missionary in Northern Brazil, writes that Indians from the Sierra de Ibiapaba (capitania

de Ceará at the frontier to Maranhão) wrote to the Jesuits in the mid 17th century about their vindications concerning Indian towns (aldeias) in Maranhão.¹⁷ These texts are lost.

A short comparison with Indigenous writing in Guarani in the La Plata region

As comparison with the Brazilian indigenous documents we should have a closer look at the indigenous documents left about colonial Paraguay and the La Plata-region.

We won't repeat here the known facts about Jesuit use of Guarani language in the reducciones from their founding in 1608 on, nor will we present the most important linguistic and religious work the Jesuits left and their translations of European works in Guarani as the edition of Nieremberg's *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* published in the reducciones in 1705 with marvellous plates made by the Indians copying mostly European models but showing great skill and originality. Our focus, instead, is to see which kinds of indigenous documents we have from this region, as studies by Neumann show that extensive documents have been left by the Guarani Indians.¹⁸

In the reducciones we can observe a selective alphabetization amongst the corregedores, secretarios, mayordomos, cabildantes, or music teachers. Writing was an established socio-cultural technique between the Indians in the reducciones. Some reducciones had extended territories with outposts for the collecting of mate-tea and the pasture of animal herds. This made writing necessary to cover the whole territory by the use of written documents showing an advanced "mestiçagem cultural" (Neumann, 2005: 56).¹⁹

However, the main purpose of writing was to maintain the communication between the guarani elite and the Spanish administration. The most important and transmitted documents written by Indians are letters. They outnumber other genres in colonial time – the recipients were mostly the Spanish authorities, but we know of letters between Indians and Jesuits or between rebellious Indians (Neumann calls them "bilhete") with a private, often political

¹⁷ Antonio Vieira, *Escritos sobre os índios*, ensaio introdutório de J.C. Sebe Bom Meihy, São Paulo: Loyola 1992 in his *Relação da missão da Serra de Ibiapaba*, 139, cited in Neumann 2005: 58.

¹⁸ Eduardo Neumann, *Práticas letradas guarani, produção e usos da escrita indígena (séculos XVII e XVIII)*, Tese UFRJ, 2005 and Neumann 2004a and b.

¹⁹ We have a lot of documentary evidence about smaller documents such as writing on talismans, lists of Indians having to work with Spaniards read aloud by others, *laisser-passer* when Indians travelled to other villages, inscriptions in erected crosses in the country, see for these items Neumann 2005: 96-102.

character. Few of these letters listed in extenso by Neumann (2005, Annex: 296-311) are published up to now.²⁰

We also have Atas de cabildo which registered the decisions during a cabildo meeting. These documents begin in the mid-18th century. Normally they contain a lot of letters, sometimes they reconstruct past events in a summary form in these letters. Most of them were probably written for special purposes such as to answer special inquiries by the governor of Buenos Aires but used the opportunity given for resuming various other related events of interest for the community. Cabildos existed from the beginning of the 17th century in Indian villages. However the first document from a cabildo is an isolated letter from 1630.²¹ Neumann (2005: 291) thinks that Jesuits didn't conserve early documents to be able to control the Indian historical memory. Maybe they existed only in a small number in Guarani.

We have two indigenous "diaries" about events considered crucial for the indigenous collective memory:

Diário hecho por un indio de lo que sucedió en el segundo desalojamiento de los portugueses (de la Colônia de Sacramento) en 10 de septiembre de 1704 [hasta 18 de marzo de 1705]. The fact that the text was conserved was unknown before Bartolomeu Melià gave small extracts in Spanish in his publication 2002, the only accessible "original" is today a Xerox copy of the original manuscript whose whereabouts are unknown, it was sold in 1954 and is now probably in a private collection in Argentina). Our edition²² of this important text is the first one of this chronological Memoria in original Guarani (and Spanish translation) about the participation of Guarani Indians in the conquest of Colonia del Sacramento in 1704/1705 (now Colonia in Uruguay). This place changed various times its rulers as it was an important place for smuggling goods from the Portuguese territory to the Spanish one. The text, conserved in manuscript form with the later added title "Diário hecho por un indio de lo que sucedió en el segundo desalojamiento de los portugueses [de Colonia de Sacramento]" and never before

²⁰ The only published letters are 7 written by Guarani Indians (Archivo Histórico nacional de Madrid, Legajo 120j) published by Francisco Mateos 1949.

²¹ "Resposta que os índios de Santo Inácio deram aos Padres Joseph Cataldino e Cristoval de Mendiola... Santo Inácio 14-VII 1 630", in: *Manuscritos da Coleção de Angelis*. Ed. Jaime Cortesão, 1 (1951): 352-361, Document XLIX, Indian answers in Guarani: 352-354).

²² *Guarinihape tecocue – Lo que pasó en la guerra (1704-1705)*, Memoria anónima en guarani del segundo desalojo de la Colonia del Santo Sacramento / Uruguay de los portugueses por los españoles, edición crítica en transliteración diplomática con traducción al castellano, introducción y notas por Harald Thun, Leonardo Cerno y Franz Obermeier, Fontes Americanae 5, Kiel, Westensee-Verl. 2015.

edited, is the first literary work written in Uruguay and more a “Memoria” than a “Diary”. Internal evidence as linguistic corrections and a retrospective perspective show us that it was written at least some time after the events. The author(s) probably used various texts: a chronological diary in Guaraní, noting the canon shootings during the siege of Colonia and another very detailed Memoria, probably in Spanish, about the military exploits of the Guaraní militia as allies of the Spaniards during the war. These texts were joined together in a Guaraní version after the events. The author of the text is not known. It is improbable that a Guaraní-Indian wrote the text for his own sake. Even though literacy skills were widespread among the indigenous élite of the reducciones, writing was controlled by the Jesuits. The text as we have it today served first of all to document the military contribution of the Guaraní. It mentions at the end a theatrical performance about the war in August 1705 after the reconquest of Colonia in February of the same year. This performance was done on occasion of the visit by one of the military protagonists of the siege, the *mestre del campo* Bartolomé García Ros, later Governor of Paraguay to the missions. To García Ros is given a superior role in the diary, maybe for flattering this important ally of the Jesuits. These retrospective mentions and the very elaborated character of the text exclude that it was written as a “diary” on the spot, but may depend on a Memoria written there, most likely not by an Indian, but by a Jesuit lay father (“hermano”) who had close contact with the Indians.

The other text is a short Diario from Yapeyú 1752-54 in *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la provincia del Paraguay*. Ed. P. Pastells vol. VIII, 1949: 194-198.

One other historical memorial (Memoria histórica) is conserved.²³ It tells us the history of Yapeyú, a particularly important reduction. Other such texts existed, the Jesuit José Manuel Peramás mentions some, but they didn’t come to us. Neumann (2005) sees them as to be considered a beginning of an “indigenous historiography” in the second half of the 18th century. The authors were certainly administrators, one author was corregidor, identifying themselves probably with the Jesuits’ colonial project. Reasons for the increased interest in writing from 1750 on can be reconstructed from historical context. In 1750 the restrictions for the indigenous writing from former times didn’t exist any more. It is uncertain in which

²³ Memoria para las generaciones venideras de los indios misioneros del pueblo de Yapeyú, translated by the missions’ vicar (at the end is written: “Esta memoria, que se halló en poder de un cacique indio Guaraní escrita en su idioma, fué traducida por el Vicario general de las Misiones delegado en 1826.” in: Pablo Hernández 1913, vol. 1, text nr. 21, 1913: 546-549. Relating briefly events from 1657 to 1708 the text seems more a short historical chronology than an elaborated “Memoria”).

degree Jesuits interfered in the texts (stressing for instance the devotional aspects) but there is certainly no evidence that they always imposed writing for their own purposes. As we don't have the original Guarani version of these smaller texts if they ever existed every interpretation has to consider the limitations to the Spanish texts.

There is only one important personal relation written by a mayordomo. These administrators controlled products grown or collected for commercial purposes in the reducciones and needed writing for their office. We have a text from Crisanto Nerenda, an administrador in the Reducción San Luis. It is a personal narrative, written during his imprisonment after the Guarani war in 1754 until his return to the reducciones. Later it has been translated by Bernardo NUSDORFFER, a Jesuit superior, to demonstrate the Indians' fidelity to the Jesuits.²⁴ Only this translation is conserved. For the Indians' collective memory we also have to mention the Guarani translation of Montoya's *Conquista espiritual* by an unknown Jesuit conserved in two manuscripts.²⁵ At least in this text Jesuits obviously aimed to form a sort of Guarani historical memory (with strong antiportuguese tendencies). Other historical narratives certainly existed but are lost. Furthermore I discovered a partly manuscript translation in Guarani of Nicolás del Techo's *Historia*, published Leiden 1673 in the National Library in Rio, which hasn't been examined until now. However the status of these texts as historical memory still has to be discussed. As in our discussion in the Introduction of *Lo que pasó en la guerra* these texts are to be situated in a complex network of various uses and therefore are not to be seen as written only for one main purpose of Guarani memory.

Some years ago I rediscovered a text mentioned in 19th century bibliographies, but lost later on, the copy of a nowadays lost original, which was in the 19th century part of the collection owned by Friedrich von Gülich (1820-1903), first German ambassador in the La Plata countries.²⁶ This copy made for the Brazilian Emperor Pedro II in 1878 on request of the

²⁴ Conserved in the Archivo historico nacional in Madrid, Legajo 120, Doc. 56, "Relación de lo que sucedió a 53 Indios del Uruguay ... escribió un Indio luisista que fue uno de estos 53, Llamado Chrisanto, ... Indio Capay y mayordomo del pueblo, tradujo lo un Misionero de la Lengua Guarani en castellano Año 1755". We have only this translation by the Jesuit NUSDORFFER, not the Guarani original.

²⁵ Ruiz de Montoya, Antonio (1585-1652) wrote his *Conquista espiritual*. Madrid: Imprenta del Reyno, 1639 about the forced translocation of Guarani-Indians from Guaira (today Southern Brazil) to adjacent Spanish American regions. We have two translations in Guarani. The Rio manuscript has been published in the *Anais da Biblioteca nacional de Rio*, Bd. 6, 1878/79 (entire volume). In the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, now Cracowia, Biblioteka Jagiellońska is another manuscript version in Guarani: an edition is currently prepared by Manfred Ringmacher.

²⁶ For Gülich's biography see my article: Der Beginn literarischer und linguistischer Beziehungen zwischen Argentinien und Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert. Der Beitrag von Friedrich von Gülich, presented during the congress of the Asociación Alemana de Hispanistas at Heidelberg 2015, online 2016. http://macau.uni-kiel.de/receive/macau_publ_00000903.

German linguist Julius Platzmann (1832-1902) later came into the private collection of the American linguist Daniel Garrison Brinton (1837-1899), who gave his entire collection to the Penn Museum Library in Pennsylvania.²⁷ This text represents a hitherto unknown genre of a didactical colloquy. It is a fragmentary collection of various dialogues about practical aspects of everyday life. An exact dating is not possible, but it was probably made in the beginning of the 18th century a time in which most extant Jesuit manuscripts in Guarani were written. Another different more extensive version of this manuscript was recently discovered by French researchers.²⁸

As a conclusion about indigenous writing in the La Plata region we may say that writing was a routine indigenous activity in the Jesuit reducciones and was maintained even after the Jesuits' expulsion.²⁹ First exclusively destined to catechetical purposes and copying European manuscripts in the famous "letras de molde", writing later assumed other specific aims. Alphabetization conferred social prestige to Indians. The diversity of textual genres especially in the mid-18th century shows their great familiarity with writing. Writing was connected with power. Transmission of useful and actual information and in part a selection of memory was central to Guarani writing. During crisis periods such as the Guerra guaraníca in the mid-18th century, writing assumed a more important function far beyond practical aspects or direct contact with Spanish authority and permitted social identification between the Guarani rebelling against the Portuguese. Some genres transcend obvious practical aims: diaries and private texts appeared in small number, they were aimed to a larger indigenous audience and probably read aloud by literate Indians. Chronological writing in diaries introduced a European concept of "historical time". Some texts as the Montoya translation in Guarani and the Gülich-manuscript may also have had a didactical function for practice in using the Guarani language as a literary one and for spreading knowledge about the Guarani-past and the social norms in the reducciones even among the recently arrived missionaries or the indigenous élite. The importance of the longer texts for a historical memory has still to be discussed.

²⁷ See the edition (in preparation): *Âng tobeete acoÿ teco cò mombĩřagui – Dejad ahora aquellas costumbres ancestrales*. Manual anónimo en guaraní de la gestión de las Reducciones (inicio del siglo XVIII, Manuscrito Gülich), edición crítica con reproducción facsimilar del original, traducción al castellano, introducción y notas de Harald Thun, Leonardo Cerno, Franz Obermeier, con la ayuda de Angélica Otazú Melgarejo, Fontes Americanae 6. Kiel, Westensee-Verl. 2016.

²⁸ This manuscript is in Luján, Museo Udaondo. See: Cecilia Adoue, Capucine Boidin, Mickaël Orantin, *Les Diálogos en guarani, un manuscrit inédit des réductions jésuites du Paraguay (XVIII^e siècle)*, online publication 2015: *Novos Mundos, Nouveaux mondes*, <https://nuevomundo.revues.org/>.

²⁹ See the bibliography in Neumann (2005) and some documents, mainly letters and some administrative texts published and transcribed during the *Langas*-Project: http://www.langas.cnrs.fr/temp/recherche_lexicale.php.

Indigenous writing served various purposes. Writing facilitated Indian self-government and direct contact with the colonial powers, the latter becoming central after the Jesuits' expulsion. Writing helped to transmit current knowledge about transactions with the Spanish and Portuguese (as for instance the armistice in the Guerra guaraníca). Writing in Guarani was a part of identity, a voluntary adoption of European codes, rules and ways to negotiate with power. The use of Guarani tended to disappear in official documents after Governor Bucareli's Instructions from 1768 favoring the use of Spanish modelled on the Portuguese *Diretório dos Índios* 1757-1798 applied in Brazil. However it still existed until the early 19th century.³⁰

Conclusion

The Brazilian Indian documents are lost with the only exception of the correspondence during the Dutch war, presented in this article, although some may be still extant in archives and not yet be known. There is a lot more material from the La Plata region, because the organization in the reducciones and the political conflicts in the mid-18th century favored the spreading of Indian writings in the La Plata-region during that period. *Aldeamento* in Brazil was tried, but never achieved such a continuously maintained structure as in Paraguay *reducciones*, due to the loss of large numbers of indigenous population to illnesses more easily spread in settlements and due to the continuous pressures by settlers, preferring their Indian labourers to live near their *estancias* and therefore using their political pressure among local officials. A historical memory could not be developed by the Brazilian Indians. As no codification of indigenous participation in *aldeias* (at least for minor functions) existed as it was usual in the *reducciones*, and as there was no possibility for the Indians to start a social career in colonial Brazil, the need for writing and reading skills was minor and restricted to a narrow category of military leaders in the Dutch wars or some *cabildo* members. However, there is evidence that official correspondence from indigenous "cabildos" existed, although certainly in a smaller amount than in the La Plata region.

³⁰ See Guilherme Wilde/ Ana Couchonnal 2014.

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1645-1646, Brieven en Papieren.

Vol. Nr. 61 item 59 and item 61 (copy of 59):

<http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/archief/inventaris/index/eaidid/1.05.01.01/inventarisnr/61/level/file>.

Vol. Nr. 62, items 52-59:

<http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/archief/inventaris/index/eaidid/1.05.01.01/inventarisnr/62/level/file>.

See the Table below for the digital version.

Crisanto Nerenda “Relación de lo que sucedió a 53 Indios del Uruguay cuando acometieron por 2 con otros muchos el fuerte de los Portugueses del Rio Pardo, escribió un Indio luisista que fue uno de estos 53, Llamado Chrisanto, de edad como de 40 años, Indio Capay y mayordomo del pueblo, tradujo lo un Misionero de la Lengua Guarani en castellano Año 1755”. Archivo historico national. Madrid Legajo 120, Doc. 56. (translation by the Jesuit Bernhard Nussdorfer, the Guarani original is lost).

Abschrift / eines / Im Privatbesitz des Herrn von Guelich befindlichen / Handschriftlichen/ Guarani = Fragmentes / Im Auftrage von / Julius Platzmann / für Herrn Dr. Karl Henning / angefertigt durch / Emanuel Forchammer / Leipzig, im März 1878; Daniel Garrison Brinton Library, Penn Museum Library, Berendt-Brinton Linguistic Collection. Item 215 now in the Rare Book and Manuscript Collection of the Univ. of Pennsylvania.

Online:

http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/pageturn.html?id=MEDREN_4226236¤tpage=3

Techo, Nicolás del (1611-1685) Guarani translation of a part of his *Historia provinciæ Paraquariæ Societatis Jesu*, Authore P. Nicolao de Techo ejusdem societatis sacerdote Gallo-Belga insulensi, Leiden 1673, as: *História do Paraguai em guarani*, without date, Rio: Biblioteca nacional.

Table to access the original documents of Indigenous letters from Dutch Brazil in the digital version.

To facilitate the use of the scans we give the scan numbers in the digitized Archive materials in Den Haag

- Only one item is in collection **1646. Vol. Nr. 61, Nr. 59 and 61** in the Brieven en Papieren: (only conserved in Dutch translation)
- [61] Nr: 59, Brief (kopie) van Peter Pottij, te Paraiba, aan Felipe Camarao en Diego da Costa. 1645 oktober 31 Scans 699-702
a copy is in the same part of the collection as
- [61] Nr.61, Brief (duplicaat) van Peter Pottij, te Paraiba, aan Felipe Camarao en Diego da Costa. 1645 oktober 31 Scans 705-708.

The other texts are in the collection vol. **Nr. 62, items 52-59:**

- 52., Brief in het Tupi, van sergeant Dom Diogo Pinheiro Camarao, te Serinhaem, aan Pedro Poti (=Peter Pottij). 1645 oktober 21 Scan 328
- 53., Brief in het Tupi, van kapitein Antonio Felipe Camarao aan Pedro Poti (=Peter Pottij) de Paraiba. 1645 oktober 4 Scan 333
- 54., Brief in het Tupi, van sergeant Dom Diogo Pinheiro Camarao aan kapitein Bartzazar Arab[.]ana. 1645 oktober 21 Scan 336
- 55., Brief in het Tupi, van kapitein Felipe Camarao aan kapitein Antonio Paraupaba in Rio Grande. 1645 oktober 4 Scan 339
- 56., Brief in het Tupi, van Antonio Felipe Camarao aan Pedro Poti (=Peter Pottij). 1646 oktober Scan 342
- 57., Brief in het Tupi van kapitein Felipe Camarao. 1645 augustus 19 Scan 343
- 58., Brief (kopie vertaald uit het Tupi) van Felipe Camarao aan de indianen in dienst van de Nederlanders. 1646 maart 28 Scan 344
- 58A., Brief van Johannes Eduart aan N.N. ("Uwe Edele") ten geleide van vertalingen van brieven van Camerao aan Pedro Pottij (dd. 22-10-1645, 4-10-1645, 1-10-1645, 27-10-1645, 19-8-1645) en Antonio Parauba (1-10-1645) 1646 juli 6 Scan 348, Translations Scans 349-352.
- 59., Brief (kopie vertaald uit het Tupi) van kapitein Antonio Camarao, in het areal St. Andries te Paraiba, aan de indiaanse officieren in dienst van de Nederlanders. 1646 augustus 12 Scans 353-355.

The translations:

Souto Maior, Pedro. 1913. "Fastos pernambucanos." *Revista do Instituto histórico e geográfico brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro. Tomo LXXV 1912, Parte I (1913): 259-504.

With linguistic commentary:

Sampaio, Theodoro, „Cartas tupis dos Camarões.“ *Revista do Instituto Archeologico e Geographico Pernambucano*. Tomo XII, Nr. 68 (1906): 201-305. Online <http://biblio.etnolinguitica.org/sampaio-1906-cartas>, Translation 289-297, commentary 298-305.

Other extracts:

Ribeiro, Darcy / Moreira Neto, Carlos de Araujo (eds.). 1993. *A fundação do Brasil: testemunhos 1500-1700*. 2. ed., Petrópolis 1993, (the Indian letters in extracts 229-232).

One letter (21.10.1641) Diogo Camarão to Pedro Poti in: Eduardo de Almeida Navarro, *Método moderno de tupi antigo, a língua do Brasil dos primeiros*, 2. ed., Petrópolis: Editora Vozes 199, Document Nr. 36: 527-531.

The same letter (transcription/Spanish) in Obermeier/Cerno 2013.
(added transcription and Spanish translation from Letter 2: Pay-tupã aé che Papera aymondó ndêbe...).

Abstract

Documents in indigenous languages in colonial Brazil and the La Plata-Region written by the Tupi or Guarani themselves are a rather new field of research. Most of these documents are not yet published or were unknown until recently. The article stresses that the early documents have been written (or indirectly transmitted as for instance in travel books) by the so called "Go-between", Europeans or Indians living in two civilizations, their own and the Spanish/Portuguese one of the colony. In the La Plata-region the texts in Guarani were mainly written by or for the indigenous élite in the reducciones, the Jesuit mission settlements, some of the remaining texts as the newly rediscovered Gülich-manuscript here presented were also written for use of the new missionaries to improve their use of the Guarani-language in special pragmatic situations. Other texts such as a Guarani Memoria about the Guarani participation in the Spanish conquest of Colonia del Sacramento (now Colonia, Uruguay) in 1704/1705 are very complex and should not be seen mainly as part of an Indigenous historical memory as they were certainly written in the version we have nowadays by Jesuits, probably hermanos (lay brothers). In the case of Brazil we only have a military correspondence in Tupi written by Potiguara-Indians allied to the rival parties during the Brazilian-Dutch war in 1645/1646 (Diogo Pinheiro Camarão and Antônio Filipe Camarão to Poti and Antônio Paraupaba, we have also translations of the answering letter by Poti). The biographies of these indigenous military leaders are here presented. A comparison between the Brazilian and the La Plata-based indigenous literacy and the historical and sociolinguistic background is tried. These texts show us that the common idea about an illiterate or semi-illiterate indigenous population in colonial South-America has to be thoroughly revised.